

Hepatitis A Diagnosed in Restaurant Worker; Immunoglobulin Offered to Patrons

(July 30, 9:45 a.m.) The Maricopa County Department of Public Health has identified one case of hepatitis A in a food service worker employed at The Cheesecake Factory located at 24th Street and Camelback.

Based upon the duties of this person and other factors, the risk of transmission to any patrons of the restaurant is thought to be low. For those who ate there specifically on Friday, July 20, a preventive treatment is available that may prevent or lessen the severity of the disease.

In response, the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, with the assistance of staff from the Phoenix Fire Department, will offer Immunoglobulin (IG) to patrons who ate at the establishment on July 20 at the Maricopa County Public Health Clinic on Monday, July 30 and Tuesday, July 31. IG is not a vaccine, but is an injection that will prevent or reduce the severity of infection. Immunoglobulin (IG) is the standard preventive treatment for hepatitis A. For those patrons who ate at the establishment on July 20, this treatment or the hepatitis A vaccine may be effective in preventing illness up to August 3.

Dr. Karen Lewis, medical director for the Arizona Department of Health Services added, "If IG is not available, the hepatitis A vaccine can be substituted. However, we suggest people who think they may have been exposed and who cannot attend the clinic contact their health care professional about receiving the hepatitis A vaccine."

WHAT: Free Inoculation of IG

WHO: Patrons who ate at The Cheesecake Factory, 24th St and Camelback on July 20 -- EXCEPTIONS - Anyone who has ever contracted hepatitis A or anyone who has received the hepatitis A vaccine does NOT need IG -- PLEASE BRING YOUR IMMUNIZATION RECORDS

WHEN: Monday and Tuesday July 30 and 31
8 a.m. -6 p.m.

WHERE: Maricopa County Public Health Clinic
1645 E. Roosevelt St., Phoenix

CONTACT: 602-747-7500

"The person who contracted hepatitis A last worked at the establishment on July 20," said Dr. Bob England, director for the Maricopa County Department of Public Health. "There is a two week window between exposure and when IG is effective, so people who think that they may have been exposed on July 20 are invited to come to our clinic on Monday or Tuesday."

Hepatitis A is a viral illness that affects the liver. It is spread by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with stool from an infected person, such as someone who has not properly washed their hands. Symptoms include: nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, fever, abdominal pain, dark colored urine, light or whitish colored bowel movements, and jaundice – a yellow color to skin or eyes. Symptoms usually develop approximately one month after exposure to the virus, but can appear anywhere from 15 to 50 days after exposure. Because of this, anyone who ate at this restaurant between July 1 and July 14 may also have been exposed, but unfortunately it is too late for this preventive treatment. Persons with these symptoms should contact their health care provider.

The illness can last for several weeks or months and can cause severe symptoms, but people generally recover completely. Hepatitis A can be life threatening in the elderly or those with chronic liver disease. Hepatitis A can be prevented by a vaccine or the administration of immunoglobulin, an injection that can prevent the disease, but this must be given within two weeks of exposure.

England also noted that this is a good reminder why people should be up to date on all of their vaccinations, including hepatitis A. "If you have already been vaccinated against hepatitis A then you are protected against infection and do not need IG," he said.

Employees from The Cheesecake Factory at 24th St. and Camelback were offered IG at a special clinic by Public Health nurses and Phoenix Fire medics. England added, "This isn't about anything the restaurant necessarily did wrong. This kind of thing can happen anywhere. I hope restaurants use this as an opportunity to consider vaccinating employees against hepatitis A."

"The Cheesecake Factory has had multiple inspections by our sanitarians and is cooperating with the department to ensure no further exposures will occur," said John Power, director of the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department.

To limit the spread of hepatitis A and many other diseases, health officials recommend washing hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers; washing hands thoroughly before eating, touching or preparing food; and staying home if you're not feeling well.

For more information about hepatitis A, visit the Centers for Disease Control. The Cheesecake Factory has also set up a hotline at 1-800-328-7761 for guest inquiries.

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and promoting the health of the nearly 4 million residents of Maricopa County. Through a variety of programs and services, the Public Health department

monitors, prevents and treats harmful diseases and health conditions. For more information about the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, call (602) 506-6900.
(Source: Maricopa County Department of Public Health)